

## Tayyouneh clashes: One year later, questions remain unanswered

*L'Orient-Le Jour* looks back on the episode that brought to life, for one day, the demons of the civil war.

OLJ / Lyana ALAMEDDINE, Jeanine JALKH et Guilhem DORANDEU, 15 October 2022

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Amal and Hezbollah militiamen armed with Kalashnikov assault rifles and rocket launchers, Oct. 14, 2021, near Tayyouneh. (Credit: Ibrahim Amro/AFP)

“Why do you want to reopen the wounds of the past?” asked residents of Chiyah and Ain al-Rummaneh, interviewed one year since the deadly clashes in their neighborhoods.

On Oct. 14, 2021, armed clashes took place in Beirut’s Tayyouneh area, which straddles Chiyah and Ain al-Rummaneh, leaving seven people dead and roughly 30 injured. The

fighting occurred when Amal Movement and Hezbollah supporters clashed with armed men, allegedly belonging to the Lebanese Forces.

In the absence of any results from the official investigation into the incident, conflicting stories of what happened that day, as well as many unanswered questions, remain one year later.

Here, *L'Orient-Le Jour* takes a look back at the main events, which brought back, for one day, the demons of the country's Civil War.

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It was 9 a.m. on Oct. 14, 2021.

Amal Movement and Hezbollah supporters began to gather in front of the Justice Palace in Adlieh, two hours ahead of a planned demonstration against the arrest warrant issued the day before by Judge Tarek Bitar for Ali Hassan Khalil, an Amal MP and former minister, in connection to the Beirut port blast investigation.

On the sidelines of the demonstration, some supporters of Amal and Hezbollah entered the nearby, predominantly Christian neighborhood of Ain al-Rummaneh, chanting slogans against Lebanese Forces (LF) leader Samir Geagea, and damaging cars.

Amid this confusion, the first bullet was fired. One year later, that bullet is still the subject of conflicting stories and testimonies.

The pro-Amal and Hezbollah protesters “took a detour from Badaro through the alleyway that leads to Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in the Ain al-Rummaneh

neighborhood” about 800 meters from the Tayyouneh roundabout, George Nader, a former army officer, told *L’Orient-Le Jour*.

Pierre Bou Assi, an LF MP for Baabda, said: “Clashes broke out between [the protesters] and the neighborhood’s residents who opposed them. But very quickly shots were fired and there were people injured.”

This version of events is corroborated by other sources within the LF, as well as local residents and army soldiers. In the opposite camp, however, the narrative is quite different.

“Some [demonstrators] launched provocative slogans, which was a mistake. But right after, the shooting started and victims fell on one side only,” Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah said in his speech on Oct. 18, 2021.

Who fired the first shot? The versions still differ.

At 11:57 a.m., as the fighting raged, the army issued a press release via Twitter stating, “As demonstrators moved towards the Justice Palace, they came under fire from the neighborhoods of Tayyouneh and Badaro.”

In the early evening, the army issued another statement, this time saying there had been “an altercation followed by an exchange of fire” which “resulted in the death of a number of citizens and injuries.”

The two sides placed the blame on each other.



Soldiers positioned around the Tayyouneh roundabout, Oct. 14, 2021. (Credit: João Sousa/L'Orient Today)

Hezbollah and Amal accused LF members of having “deployed in the surrounding neighborhoods and on rooftops,” and of shooting down “martyrs” who were merely participating in “a peaceful demonstration,” showing a “will to kill.”

LF rejected these charges, insisting in a statement that day that “heavily armed members walked into secure neighborhoods.”

The same day, Fadi Akiki, the government commissioner to the Military Court, requested that army intelligence conduct a field investigation on the incident.

Akiki declined to respond to *L'Orient-Le Jour's* questions.

According to a source with access to a preliminary intelligence report, the report states the first shots were fired by the Amal and Hezbollah supporters. *L'Orient-Le Jour* was unable to review the report.

“The first four injured people in the clashes were from the LF,” the source said, adding that the LF supporters later retaliated.

Citing the same report, the pro-Hezbollah daily Al Akhbar attributed the first shot to members of Amal and Hezbollah in an article, published on Oct. 29, that intended to point a finger at the LF. The article added that reinforcements then joined LF members and fired at the demonstrators.

Shortly after, complete chaos ensued, and the first victims fell.

At the end of the morning, the army asked civilians to evacuate the streets where the clashes were taking place and warned that it would fire on anyone who was armed.

The sound of gunfire and even grenade launchers echoed throughout the area.

The capital was calm again by the late afternoon, but the death toll sat at seven people: three Amal militiamen, three Hezbollah militiamen and a civilian woman killed by a stray bullet. About 30 people were injured.

A video made the rounds on social media networks showing an army soldier, on the ground, shooting at demonstrators, who would be questioned later by the judiciary, as Nasrallah demanded.

**How prepared were those involved in the clashes?**

*Hezbollah and Amal:*

On Oct. 13, 2021, Amal called for a protest, which was joined by Hezbollah, in a bid to remove Bitar, whom they accused of being “politically motivated” in his [port blast investigation](#).

One day earlier, on Oct. 12, Ali Hassan Khalil set the tone by telling the Al-Mayadeen channel that “all options are open for a political or another kind of escalation.”

So, what was the role played by Amal and Hezbollah supporters — who showed up in large numbers armed during the clashes — in the violence that followed?

Was the “detour” through Ain al-Rummaneh premeditated among the higher echelons of the parties?

Although Nasrallah did not touch on this point in his Oct. 18, 2021 speech, he implied that precautions — notably in the choice of protest slogans — had been taken to avoid any potential clashes.

A Hezbollah spokesperson did not respond to *L’Orient-Le Jour*’s request for comment. Amal did also not offer any official explanations as to why its sympathizers entered the Christian neighborhood.

According to a military source close to Hezbollah, “it is difficult to prove that there was an order from Amal’s command” to enter Ain al-Rummaneh.

This opinion is shared by other sources who stressed that, while the Amal supporters’ actions might have been a spur-of-the-moment decision, it is less plausible for an organization as hierarchical as Hezbollah.



These arguments did not convince the LF.

“Attacks with machine guns and rocket launchers cannot be spontaneous,” Bou Assi said.



Amal protesters and soldiers converge on the Tayyouneh roundabout, Oct. 14, 2021. (Credit: Mohammad Yassine)

Elie Kayssar (LF), Ain al-Rummaneh’s mukhtar (a local elected official), said neighborhood residents — who are predominantly Christian — shared voice messages the day before of residents of nearby Chiyah — who are predominantly Shiite — in which the latter said that they would enter Ain al-Rummaneh on Oct. 14.

If Amal and Hezbollah “had in mind to control the modus operandi of the demonstration so that it does not degenerate, they could have done so,” LF spokesperson Charles Jabbour told *L’Orient-Le Jour*.

But according to the source who reviewed the army intelligence report, “there is no evidence that [entering Ain al-Rummaneh] was an order from the command” of either party.

*Lebanese Forces:*

Early on, Amal and Hezbollah blamed the clashes on the LF.

In his Oct. 18 speech, Nasrallah went so far as to accuse the LF of wanting to drag the country into a “new civil war.”

Several LF officials were swift to deny accusations that the party’s supporters sparked the hostilities.

The LF was able to take advantage of the “publicity offered by Nasrallah, who did Geagea a great service,” said Nader.

As soon as the news about mobilization in Tayyouneh came out, Geagea said he urged “a total and peaceful confrontation, in case other party tries to impose its will by force.”

According to the Al Akhbar newspaper, armed groups of the LF were already mobilized the day before the clashes in the streets of Ain al-Rummaneh.

Simon Moussalem, head of security in Meraab (Geagea’s residence north of Beirut), “inspected” the neighborhood with dozens of members, according to Al Akhbar. There reportedly was a video showing LF members handing two AK-47 assault rifles to others.



“The neighborhood’s residents were prepared in advance. They were only protecting themselves, but it was not a centralized order from the LF command,” Jabbour said, admitting that LF partisans from other areas had indeed come to Ain al-Rummaneh.

The military sources contacted by *L’Orient-Le Jour* had different versions of the story. A military source close to Hezbollah said that LF snipers “not living in the neighborhood” had been posted on the roofs of the buildings.

Meanwhile, Nader insisted that soldiers were only ordered to shoot at armed operatives: “Do you really think that they would not have targeted an LF [member] if they had a weapon?”

According to the source with access to the intelligence file, there is no evidence that the LF command gave the order to open fire.



A Lebanese army vehicle in the Adlieh district of Beirut on Oct. 14, 2021. (Credit: Mohammad Yassine)

*The Lebanese Army:*

On Oct. 19, 2021, *L'Orient-Le Jour* reported that the day before the clashes, “the army received assurances from all political parties that there wouldn’t be any escalation.”

In his Oct. 18, speech, Nasrallah said the day before the planned demonstrations, Hezbollah had requested the army “to deploy in force” and that he “fully trusts the troops and the Lebanese state.”

According to Jabbour, the LF spokesperson, Geagea had also contacted army chief Gen. Joseph Aoun, to “inform him that something is brewing in the area and that it is [his] responsibility to be careful.”

Most of the sources interviewed confirm these contacts: “The army knew that things could go wrong” in this area, which was once a frontline in the civil war, according to Nader.

“When there’s a risk of a sectarian conflict, [the army] should take whatever measures are necessary and become ruthless in order not to let things turn ugly,” he added.

According to a military official quoted in an Oct. 19, 2021 article in *L'Orient-Le Jour*, two army units were deployed: the Navy Special Forces around the Justice Palace and the Eleventh Brigade at the entrances to Chiyah.

“These two forces alone were insufficient” to secure the entire area, the military source said.

For LF MP Bou Assi, “The fear of spillover did not translate into a preventive measure by the army.” He nevertheless added that “during the clashes, the army assumed its responsibilities.”

Jabbour, for his part, said he believed that both Amal and Hezbollah, “thought things would unfold like May 7, 2008,” when Hezbollah took control of several neighborhoods in the western part of Beirut. “But, thanks to the troops, it did not work.”



The Tayyouneh roundabout, one year after the clashes between Amal and Hezbollah militiamen and residents of the Ain al-Rummaneh district. (Credit: Joao Sousa/L'Orient Today)

### **Who fired from the rooftops?**

As soon as the first shots were fired, eyes turned to the LF — Ain al-Rummaneh being a stronghold of the party — and to local residents who some people later said took up the role of snipers.

One year after the events, the vast majority of sources contacted by *L'Orient-Le Jour* have differing views.

“The army soldiers were on rooftops to protect the area. They were not snipers affiliated with a party,” said one soldier, adding that the investigation will determine who was responsible for the clashes.

It is also clear — according to footage of the clashes — that pro-Amal and Hezbollah armed men on the ground exchanged fire with snipers on the rooftops.

However, nothing in the material collected for this article made it possible to determine whether it was army soldiers deployed on buildings' rooftops who opened fire on the protesters, or whether these shots were warnings from the military.

The military issued a statement on the morning of Oct. 14, explicitly warning: “The units deployed in Tayyouneh will shoot at any armed men in the street.”

### **What is the status of the military court investigation?**

On Oct. 14, 2021, the investigation into the clashes was entrusted to Fadi Akiki, the government commissioner to the Military Court, who is known to be close to Amal. Akiki summoned Geagea for questioning on Oct. 25, 2021, but the LF leader refused to appear.

After the clashes, 46 residents of Ain al-Remmaneh were wanted by the courts, according to their lawyer, Eliane Fakhry.

Nineteen of them were arrested and charged with “murder, attempted murder, inciting sectarian discord and forming an armed gang.”

“There was no concrete evidence. Most of the [defendants] were at home when the clashes took place, the others were simply defending themselves,” Fakhry told *L'Orient-Le Jour*.

On April 14, 2022, *L'Orient-Le Jour* reported that the lawyers for the Ain al-Rummaneh defendants filed a petition for dismissal against Judge Akiki, and the first acting investigating judge at the military court, Fadi Sawwan, took over.

Sawwan gradually released detainees but declined to respond to *L'Orient-Le Jour*'s requests for comment.

Georges Touma was the last of the Ain al-Rummaneh detainees [to be released on bail](#), on Wednesday, Oct. 12.

In Chiyah, 20 people were initially wanted by the court and three were arrested, according to Al Akhbar.

Judge Fadi Akiki charged them with “murder, attempted murder, and possession of weapons without a permit, but no charges of forming an armed gang were levied against them,” the article said.

On Wednesday, all three detainees from Chiyah were released on bail.

“A ‘political deal’ was concluded by the different parties to bury the case,” an informed source told *L'Orient-Le Jour*.

In a country where political assassinations and sectarian clashes remain systematically unpunished and unresolved, the hope of obtaining justice is, once again, very slim.

But for the families of the victims, as for many Lebanese, the truth of what happened remains crucial, not because it would “reopen the wounds of the past,” but to avoid reliving them.

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